

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1                    1.     A method for managing a transaction for a sale of goods between a  
2 customer and a merchant, the method comprising:  
3                    receiving, by a provider affiliated with a plurality of offices, a communication  
4 relating to the transaction that includes a cost for the goods;  
5                    collecting, by the provider, the cost from the customer in accordance with the  
6 communication; and  
7                    paying, by the provider, the cost to the merchant after the merchant delivers  
8 the goods.

1                    2.     The method recited in claim 1 wherein collecting the cost from the  
2 customer comprises collecting an entirety of the cost plus a service charge before the  
3 merchant delivers the goods.

1                    3.     The method recited in claim 1 wherein collecting the cost from the  
2 customer comprises:  
3                    collecting a portion of the cost plus a service charge before the merchant  
4 delivers the goods; and  
5                    collecting a remainder of the cost plus the service charge after the merchant  
6 delivers the goods.

1                    4.     The method recited in claim 1 wherein the customer and the merchant  
2 are located in different countries.

1                    5.     The method recited in claim 1 wherein the communication comprises  
2 an internet communication.

1                    6.     The method recited in claim 1 wherein the goods are delivered by the  
2 merchant to the customer.

1                    7.     The method recited in claim 1 wherein the goods are delivered by the  
2 merchant to one of the plurality of offices affiliated with the provider.

1                    8.     The method recited in claim 7 wherein collecting the cost from the  
2 customer comprises collecting the cost from the customer at the one of the plurality of  
3 offices.

1                   9.     The method recited in claim 7 further comprising releasing the goods  
2 to the customer from the one of the plurality of offices after collecting the cost from the  
3 customer.

1                   10.    The method recited in claim 7 further comprising delivering, by the  
2 provider, the goods to the customer.

1                   11.    The method recited in claim 1 further comprising providing, by the  
2 provider, a hyperlink to a web site of the merchant.

1                   12.    The method recited in claim 1 further comprising arranging, by the  
2 provider, for shipment of the goods aggregately with a plurality of goods.

1                   13.    A computer-readable storage medium having a computer-readable  
2 program embodied therein for directing operation of a computer system for a provider, the  
3 provider being affiliated with a plurality of offices and the computer system including a  
4 communications system, a processor, and a storage device, wherein the computer-readable  
5 program includes instructions for operating the computer system to manage a transaction for  
6 a sale of goods between a customer and a merchant in accordance with the following:  
7                   receiving a communication with the communications system, the  
8 communication relating to the transaction and including a cost for the goods;  
9                   recording on the storage device whether the cost has been collected from the  
10 customer in accordance with the communication and whether the merchant has delivered the  
11 goods; and  
12                   authorizing payment of the cost to the merchant with the processor after the  
13 merchant has delivered the goods.

1                   14.    The computer-readable storage medium recited in claim 13 wherein  
2 the communications system comprises an internet connection and the communication is  
3 received over the internet.

1                   15.    The computer-readable storage medium recited in claim 13 wherein  
2 the computer-readable program further includes instructions for operating the computer  
3 system for providing a hyperlink to a web site of the merchant.

1           16.     The computer-readable storage medium recited in claim 13 wherein  
2 recording on the storage device whether the cost has been collected from the customer in  
3 accordance with the communication comprises:

4                 indicating whether a portion of the cost plus a service charge has been  
5 collected before the merchant has delivered the goods; and

6                 indicating whether a remainder of the cost plus a service charge has been  
7 collected after the merchant has delivered the goods.

1           17.     The computer-readable storage medium recited in claim 13 wherein  
2 recording on the storage device whether the cost has been collected from the customer in  
3 accordance with the communication comprises indicating whether an entirety of the cost plus  
4 a service charge has been collected before the merchant delivers the goods.

1           18.     The computer-readable storage medium recited in claim 13 wherein  
2 the computer-readable program further includes instructions for operating the computer  
3 system for authorizing release of the goods to the customer from the one of the plurality of  
4 offices after collecting the cost from the customer.

1           19.     The computer-readable storage medium recited in claim 13 wherein  
2 the computer-readable program further includes instructions for operating the computer  
3 system for calculating a service charge to be charged to the customer.

1           20.     The computer-readable storage medium recited in claim 19 wherein  
2 the service charge includes shipping and insurance costs for delivering the goods.

1           21.     The computer-readable storage medium recited in claim 13 wherein  
2 the computer-readable program further includes instruction for performing a currency  
3 exchange of the cost.

1           22.     The computer-readable storage medium recited in claim 13 wherein  
2 the computer-readable program further includes instructions for operating the computer  
3 system for determining a shipment of the goods as part of an aggregate shipment.

1           23.     A computer system comprising:  
2 a communications system;  
3 a storage device;

4 a processor in communication with the communications system and the  
5 storage device; and  
6 a memory coupled with the processor, the memory comprising a computer-  
7 readable storage medium having a computer-readable program embodied therein for directing  
8 operation of the computer system for a provider affiliated with a plurality of offices to  
9 manage a transaction for a sale of goods between a customer and a merchant, the computer-  
10 readable program including:  
11 instructions for receiving a communication with the communications  
12 system, the communication relating to the transaction and including a cost for the goods;  
13 instructions for recording on the storage device whether the cost has  
14 been collected from the customer in accordance with the communication and whether the  
15 merchant has delivered the goods; and  
16 instructions for authorizing payment of the cost to the merchant with  
17 the processor after the merchant has delivered the goods.

1 24. The computer system recited in claim 23 wherein the communications  
2 system comprises an internet connection and the instructions for receiving the  
3 communication comprise instructions for receiving the communication from the internet.